



Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente

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Source: *East and West*, Vol. 46, No. 1/2 (June 1996), pp. 9-19

Published by: [Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente \(IsIAO\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29757252>

Accessed: 12/11/2013 09:35

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āsna- xratu-: Innate or Rising Wisdom?

by ANDREA PIRAS

The aim of this article is to look into the etymology of the Avestan term *āsna-*. At the same time we shall be considering a number of points that suggest a different meaning for this adjective, which is in fact coupled with the substantive *xratu-* in very few occurrences in the texts. In turn, the term *xratu-* (broadly translated as wisdom) has been the object of a great many philological and historical-cultural investigations, one of the most notable being by Strunk (1975), who sums up the history of studies on the Indo-Iranian dyad *krātu-/xratu-* and offers an overview of the semantic variations with which *xratu-* has on various occasions been translated, the terms relating to the 'volitive', 'mental' or 'magic-spiritual' areas: 'geistige Kraft', 'Wille, Willenskraft', 'Verstand', 'Einsicht', 'Weisheit'. Thus particular importance appears to attach to links with the Indo-Iranian terminology for the psycho-mental sphere like *mānas-/manab-*, *ójas-/aojah*, *citti-/cisti-* (Strunk 1975: 279 and, more recently, Mayrhofer 1989: 407). Indeed, on the basis of the Avestan evidence we can reconstruct a *xratu-* phenomenology dominated by the 'mental' component: Y.31.11 makes explicit reference to the link of dependence on the mental sphere, stating that Ahura Mazda 'fabricated' (*tašō*) *xratu-* by means of his *manab-*. It is in the Avestan texts that the connection between *xratu-* and *manab-* emerges most distinctly, especially in the case of the 'good' *manab-* of Vohu Manah (Y.28.1). Confirmation of this connection is to be found in the later literature, e.g. *P.21* and *27*, and *Siruze* 1.2 dedicated to Vohu Manah, where *āsna- xratu-* also appears. This pronounced 'mental' connotation of *xratu-* must surely have been a significant factor in the identification it undergoes in Sanskrit translation with a term of great importance in the psycho-mental anthropology of Indian culture, namely *buddhiḥ*.

With this sense of 'mental energy', conceived at a precise point in its unfolding, the syntagma *āsna- xratu-* reflects a particular situation in which I feel the adjective *āsna-* calls for a different interpretation. Normally, following the now established practice in the history of our studies, it is translated as 'innate', but it is my contention that the etymological and contextual assumptions behind this need some revising.

Its complex nature as an 'erudite' term did not escape Bartholomae (1904: 341), who took *āsna-* in its occurrences with *xratu-* as a 'gelerhtes Wort'. Indeed, it is precisely this erudite connotation that calls for more thorough analysis of *āsna-*, advancing beyond the customary practice in research history of deriving *āsna-* from the root *zan* at grade 0, of deriving from the root *zan*, of deriving *zan* from the root

at grade 0, which together with the preverb *ā-* would give rise to the adjective *āsna-* (Geldner 1879: 131), thus attributed with the meaning of ‘innate’ or ‘natural’.

The root *zan* + preverb *ā-* is attested only once in *Y.9.22: haomō āzīzanāitibiš dadāiti xšaētō.puθrīm*, ‘Haoma grants splendid offspring to women in labour’, where the feminine present participle *ā-zīzanāitī-* denotes the act of child-bearing yet to be accomplished — potential, we might say, in the sense of a ‘congenital’ faculty of all women, although not necessarily enacted. Thus it may be possible to take the ‘innate’ as something that can virtually come into being, in a borderline area between non-manifestation and manifestation, between potentiality and act. Thus the use of *ā-zan* implies a sort of semantic wavering, also to be observed in the adjective *a-zāta-*, logically a formation of *zan* in the privative sense expressing ‘non-birth’. This, however, Bartholomae (1904: 225) translates as ‘“(noch) nicht geboren” sva. “(noch) zu gebären künftigt”’, which amounts to translating *āsna-* as ‘angeboren’, ‘natürlich’, it we take it that ‘angeboren’ can be translated ‘congenital’.

In the light of a hypothesis I am about to argue, ambiguity arises over the headword *āsna-* when, for reasons both of homophony and a of certain semantic affinity between the sense of being born in *zan* and rising in *san*, roots *zan* and *san* are bundled together; indeed, the two actions may be virtually interchangeable, especially when occurring in texts showing parallel affinities. In fact, the ‘rise’ (*san*) of Mithra in *Yt.19.28* and the ‘rise’ of Daēnā in *Vd.10-30*, both connected with the first light of dawn, can both be interpreted as ‘birth’ from darkness. This connection becomes all the more convincing when we recall that the birth of victorious Saošyānt is comparable with the dawn of a new day in which the auroral epiphany is to mark eschatological renewal (Gnoli 1967: 25-30): here the verb denoting this particular ‘rising’ (in the metaphorical sense, as distinct from the actual ‘rise’ of *san*) is *zan*, as for example in *Vd.19.5 — us.zaiiāite saošiīqs vərəθraja apaṭ qasaoiīāt ušastaraṭ haca naēmāt*, ‘Victorious Saošyānt will be born from lake Kasaoya, from the left side’.

The interchangeableness of *zan/san* appears all the more marked due to the few attestations of *san* as compared with *zan*, and this, I believe, accounts for the resort made to the root *zan* to explain *āsna-*. The practice must date back to the very persons who compiled and commented upon the Avestan *corpus*; in the later periods they found some difficulty in distinguishing between the shades of meaning of the two verb roots which, as we have seen, share homophony and, to some extent, comparable semantic contents. In fact, later transmission and translation of the Avestan text shows identification between *zan* and *san* in the Pahlavi *āsn* and, even more so, with the Sanskrit *naisargikah*. In Pahlavi texts such as the *Dēnkard* (de Menasce 1973: 363) sacerdotal speculation focuses largely on comment upon every gnoseological and spiritual function such as *xrad* which, in the form of *āsn xrad*, is defined as ‘congenital’ (*zāyēnīdag*) to the soul. Actually, this connotation of the substantive *xratu-* with the qualification of *āsna-* — ‘innate’ (or ‘congenital’ in the Pahlavi texts) — fails to take in the specific nature of the Avestan *xratu-* in the *Mihr Yašt* or *Ard Yast*, where the context is better defined in terms of a mythological scenario centred on the moment of sunrise.

If we are to define and more closely delimit the contexts in the *Yāsts* in which the syntagma *āsna- xratu-* appears we must endeavour to make a greater distinction between *zan/san* than was made in later transmission and comment upon the Avestan text. Thus we may find a different formulation of the headword *āsna-*, reconsidering the etymology of *āsna-* on the basis of a different *san* root and thereby finding greater morphological and contextual coherence. Moreover, we may thus find the link between *āsna-* and *xratu-* reinforced through a fuller understanding of the ambit in which *xratu-* manifests its energy, i.e. at the very moment of dayrise. This was a particularly important event in the history of the Zoroastrian religion, not only for its mythological, cosmological and eschatological components but also on account of the role it played in light symbolism.

Thanks to the labours of Klingenschmitt (1971: 72) we can assemble a different repertory for the forms of Bartholomae's headword ²*had* (1904: 1755), identifying a different root *san* + preverb *ā-* and a theme of the present *āsnaoiti/āsənaoiti* (the latter, according to Klingenschmitt being the original form derived from **āsanaūti*), which occurs in the Mithraic context of *Yāšt* 10.13 and *Widēwdād* 19.28, 30 to denote the action of Mithra rising from the peak of mount Harā (while in *Vd.* 19.30 it expresses the rising of Daēnā — another figure in the Mithraic train — from Harā). The ambit is thus distinctly auroral, as indeed is that in *Gāh* 5.5 where the injunctive of the aorist of *san*, i.e. *sanaṭ* (erroneously identified by Bartholomae 1904: 1559 with the root *saṇd*) is used to evoke the rise of early morning lights: *ušāṇhəm yazamaide rəuuīm ranjaṭ.aspaṃ yā sanaṭ aoi haptō.karšuuairīm zaṃ* — 'we sacrifice to swift Dawn of the fleet horses, who rises on this earth from the seven regions'.

Outside the strictly Avestan *milieu* the root *san* occurs in other contexts attesting to the continuity of its meanings, mostly relating to celestial and planetary dynamics or rising in the skies and over the mountains, an example being the transmission of *san* in the Middle-Iranian literary heritage (as also in the Neo-Iranian heritage, e.g. in the languages of the Shughni group, cf. the headword *sen-t* in Morgenstierne 1974: 74). The Khotanese and Middle-Iranian material is amply reviewed in Bailey (1979: 419): *saye urmaysdām*, 'the sun having arisen' (cf. also the Buddhist Sogdian *ywyry sny*, 'sunrise'); *gara sāna*, 'mount up on the mountain'. More recently Emmerick & Skjaervø's (1987: 184), corrections to Bailey under the headword *san* reveal a use of the root to denote celestial movement, and not only the rising of the sun: see the phrase *graha sa[r]b[ī]ndä u nakṣatra u urmaysde u purra*, 'planets arise, and asterism and the sun and the moon', or the Manichaean Sogdian *snty* 3rd pers. sing. of the present, used to describe the action of light that daily 'ascends' with the celestial luminaries of the stations of the moon and the sun (Sundermann 1985: 26 [line 98], 27 [line 122]). Again, we have the Manichaean Middle-Parthian *sn-* in *Huwiḍagmān* I 48: [*brw ky*] 'br hwy[n] zmyg snyd, '[Each who] ascends up to their land' (Boyce 1954: 72-73).

In my opinion it is perfectly legitimate to substitute the root *zan* with root *san* in order to explain more cogently and convincingly the 'gelehrtes Wort' *āsna-* which, coupled with *xratu-* is to be seen in terms of an auroral phenomenology that plays a

primary role in the Avesta (as in the corresponding cultural heritage of Vedic India): preverb *ā-* + root *san* at grade 0 + suffix *-a* form the adjective *āsna-*, which may be translated as ‘rising’.

If we view the expression *āsna- xratu-* in the light of this alternative etymology we may well appreciate the validity, not only morphological but also contextual, of the syntagma indicating ‘*xratu-* rising’, or in other words particular specification of the energy and power implicit in the word *xratu-*, manifested in the pristine lights. This applies not only to later Avestan literature but also to the earliest periods: in fact, ‘rising *xratu-*’ is prefigured in the context of Y.46.3, although mention here is not of *āsna- xratu-* but of the *xratu-* of the *Saošyānts* (*saošiiaṇtām xratuuō*), an expression connected through the rhetorical figure of chiasmus (Humbach 1959: 41) with the ‘bulls of the days’, i.e. the advancing of the dawn lights.

More detailed analysis of the imagery in Y.46.3 shows that this *xratu-*, like the ‘bulls of the days’, is marked by the verb ¹*ar* + *fra-*, again denoting dawn but in the sense of advancing rather than rising (as in the case of *san*). Apart from Gathic contexts, occurrences of ¹*ar* in the later texts confirm the association with dawn. One example is in Fr.W.10.41, *āaṭ ušāṇḥam para frōrātōit* — ‘then, before the Dawns’ advance’, another in the eschatological scenario of H.N.2.9, where the appearance of Daēnā in the early morning light coincides with the scented wind: *aṇḥā dim vātaiiā frōranta sadaiietī yā hauua daēna* — ‘in the advance of this wind there appears to him his own Daēnā’. As we saw above with reference to Vd.19.30, the manifestation of Daēnā is also indicated with the verb *san* (translated in the Pahlavi version with *wizihīdan*, a verb denoting both ‘to separate’ and ‘to dawn’, cf. MacKenzie 1971: 93). The *Widēwdād* passage in question, although corrupt (*urruuānō* is an inappropriate form; one would expect an accusative), describes how the Daēnā (although not explicitly named) ‘rises’ from mount Harā (like Mithra) and performs her psychopomp function: *bā ašāunam urruuānō tarasca harām bərəzaitīm āsənaoiti tarō cinuuaṭō pəratūm vīdāraiiēti* — ‘she rises above Harā Bərəzaitī and brings the souls of the just to cross over the Cinvaṇt bridge’. Here the action of the verb *san* does not refer directly to the souls, as a causative verb, but we may reasonably postulate a certain symmetric between the ‘rising’ of Daēnā and the crossing of *urvān-*, thus justifying a different interpretation of the compound *āsnō.urruuān-* referring to the Fravaši in Yt.13.40, usually translated with the sense of ‘des Seele erfolgreich, wirksam ist’ (Bartholomae 1904: 342). Considering the connection between the *post mortem* event and the auroral/eastern context — as attested not only by Vd.19.30 but also by H.N.2.9 cited above, not to mention analogous versions in the Pahlavi texts and the Kirdīr inscriptions — we may conjecture association between *āsna-* and *urvān-*, translating the compound *āsnō.urruuān-* as ‘whose soul has risen’. The nature of *hapax* does not bear out this conjecture completely, but nor does it detract from its probability if we consider that the Fravaši are souls elevated in their transcendental condition, and that the veneration of the souls of the defunct coincides with that of the Fravaši (Y.25.7 — *iristanam urruuānō yazamaide yā ašəonam frauuašaiiō*).

In Y.46.3 the chiasmus between syntagma of the ‘bulls of the days’ (*uxšānō asnaṃ*) and of the ‘*xratu*s of the Saošyaṇts’ (*saošiiaṇtṃ xratuuō*) is the subject of the verb *frārontē*:

*kadā mazdā, yōi uxšānō asnaṃ
aṇhōuš darəθrāi, frō ašahiā frārontē
vərəzdāiš sənghāiš, saošiiaṇtṃ xratuuō*

When, oh Mazdā, will the bulls of the days advance, the *xratu*s of the Saošyaṇts, to support with fecund definitions the existence of Aša? [literally ‘in support of the existence of Aša with fecund definitions?’].

The importance of this Gathic passage (on which see recent contributions by Kellens & Pirart 1989: 159; 1991: 177) and its influence on later Avestan literature was aptly pointed out by Bartholomae (1904: 536 and n. 3), who suggested comparison with Yt.19.94 and Yt.17.2, both of which shed significant light on the specific sense of *xratu-* in connection with Saošyaṇt Astuuat.ərəta and on the role of Aši — a divinity in Mithra’s retinue — in the distribution of *xratu-*.

Following the text of the *Zamyād Yašt* edited by Hintze (1994: 381) with translation, we read:

*hō didāt xratəuš + dōiθrābiia
vīspa dāmaṇ paiti vaēnāt*

Dieser wird mit Augen geistiger Kraft schauen
Er wird seinen Blick auf alle Geschöpfe richten.

This particular type of ‘*xratu-* sight’ is thus characteristic of Saošyaṇt rising from lake Kāsaoya, passing from the virtual nature of the wet element to the victorious manifestation marking the advent of his activity to restore the whole of existence, and it is in terms of an equally virtual nature that we must view the symbolism of the mount Harā rocks from which the epiphany of Mithra rises at the point in dawn that marks the end of darkness and transition to light. A similar ideological-thematic thread links the Mithraic context with the appearance of Saošyaṇt in virtue of the auroral connotations in which the goddess Aši plays a leading role, being of Mithra’s équipe and moreover interchangeable with Mithra himself in sacrificial rites: as stated in Yt.17.2, ‘they who sacrifice with libations to Aši sacrifice with libations to Mithra’ (*yō ašim yazāite zaoθrābiiō hō miθrəm yazāite zaoθrābiiō*).

In this passage from the *Ard Yašt* we also find an important reference to links associating Aši with *xratu-* on the one hand, and with the Saošyaṇts on the other: *yā vīspanaṃ saošiiaṇtṃ fraša xradβa fraḍaṇjaiietī uta hē āsnaṃ xratūm auua.baraiti vārōma* — ‘who with the *xratu-* of all the Saošyaṇts proceeds forth and procures for them, as desired, the rising *xratu-*’.

In the Gathic passages not only *xratu-* but also *daēnā-* is mentioned in relation with the Saošyānt, syntactically connected to it by means of the genitive indicating possession 'of the' Saošyānt in Y.45.11 and Y.53.11, while in Y.34.13 the expression *daēnā saošīiantəm* is symmetrical to *saošīiantəm xratuuō* in Y.46.3. Humbach (1959: 37) classified both syntagmas in the figure of the synecdoche, adding moreover that 'Bermerkenswert ist die Verbindung mit Verben der Bewegung'. In fact, Y.34.13 refers to the '*daēnās* of the Saošyānts' that 'walk' together with Aša along the 'readily traversed' paths of Vohu Manah, while Y.46.3 describes the advances of the 'bulls of the days' (and thus of the '*xratu-* of the Saošyānts'). These matching formulas demonstrate that the relationship between *daēnā-* and *xratu-* is not merely stylistic-literary but also a functional interdependence, as aptly pointed out by Schmidt (1975: 7), which would appear to work in the form of a female/male polarity, *daēnā-* being compared with *gav-* and *xratu-* with *uxšan-*. This metaphorical equivalence in no way justifies conjecturing the etymological derivation of *daēnā-* from a root indicating 'nourishment' (as Widengren's well-known theory has it), but it can lead us to a better understanding of the figurative language of the *Gāthās*. We have seen a great variety of interpretation of the metaphorical aspects of the Early Avestan texts, but I believe we should persevere in examining the so-called 'pastoral imagery' defined by Schmidt and criticized — somewhat too vehemently, perhaps — by Humbach (1982), although his rigorous formal and stylistic analysis prompted a debate (see Schmidt's answer, 1985) that may eventually lead to far clearer definition of the metaphorical language of the *Gāthās*. Thus the problem of better defining the relationship between *daēnā-* and *xratu-* in Gathic imagery is extremely important if we are to follow the developments of the later historical-religious concepts and thus, in our particular case, gain greater insight into the figure of the Saošyānt in the scenario of *Yast* 19. Personally, at least until more decisive evidence emerges, I believe we can see the relationship between *daēnā-* and *xratu-* as forming a visionary pattern expressing — for lack of more scientific language (medical, anatomical, physiological) — the relationship between a mental sphere (*xratu-*) and the medium of sight (*daēnā-*) in its differentiated aspects as object/subject/means of vision, the former being 'masculine' as activity and energy, manifested in the receptive, reflective, matching 'femininity' of the latter. The verb root *dī-*, 'to see', is at the basis not only of *daēnā-* (with which it forms an etymological figure in Y.44.10, *təm daēnəm ... arəš daidīiat*) but also of the 'eye', *dōiθra*: in Yt.19.94 we do not have the '*daēnā-* of the Saošyānts' encountered in the Gathic texts, but the action of seeing with particular eyes — 'with the eyes of the *xratu-*' (*xratōuš dōiθrābiia*) — which, after the rise of Astuuat.ərāta from lake Kāsaoya, will render the corporeal world imperishable with their salvific gaze. Possession of *daēnā-*/vision in the Gathic texts is manifested in the *Zamyād Yašt* with the action of an eye enhanced with the energy of *xratu-* which, although not explicitly characterized as 'rising' (*āsna-*), displays all the associated features: in the first place it is associated with the dawn of the new times and the epiphany of the Saošyānt, and moreover *āsna- xratu-* is a gift made by Aši to the Saošyānts. We must therefore, I believe, see in the

expression *xratōuš dōiθrābiia* a cause/effect connection with that Mithraic *āsna- xratu-*, a source of visionary insight that opens up when dawn grants its benefits of warmth, light and mental enlightenment: when the ‘*xratus* of the *Saošyaṇts*’ advance *frārəntē* (Y.46.3) — and the *Daena* advances (*frārənta*) in the dawning of the fourth day, described in *Hādōxt Nask* 2.9, to grant the soul the power of ultramundane vision.

Thus the power of ‘*xratu-* rising’ is an energy closely connected with visionary insight — indeed, it is the cause of it, the reason for existence that depends on the moment of dawning when *Mithra* and his retinue are manifested. *Mithra*, ‘who is the first celestial god to rise from mount *Harā*’ (*yō paoiriō mainiiauuō yazatō tarō harəm āsnaoiti*, Yt.10.13), is also the one most endowed with that *āsna- xratu-* that grants vision as the *xratu-* rises from the virtuality of the rock (or night, if we take Yt.46.3), just as *Mithra* rises from the mountain. Thus the advent of one is in synchrony with the advent of the other, the spring *xratu-* being energy possessed by the *yazata* *Mithra* exceeding that of mortal men, as expressed in Yt.19.107:

nōiṭ mašim gaēθim stē masiā hacaitē āsnō xratuš
yatha miθrəmcit mainiiaom hacaitē āsnascit xratuš
nōiṭ mašiō gaēθiō stē aojō surunaoiti gaošaiβe
yatha miθrascit mainiiauuō sruṭ gaošō hazaṭra.yaoxštiš —

No earthly man in existence possesses such great rising *xratu-*
as celestial *Mithra* possesses spring *xratu-*.

No earthly man hears so much with (his) ears
as celestial *Mithra* who has understanding hearing and a thousand faculties of perception.

In his translation of this stanza (and as he specifies in his commentary) Gershevitch (1959: 256) aptly renders *āsna- xratu-* with ‘insight’, thus bringing out the peculiar nature of this visionary power connected with the auroral manifestation of *Mithra*, who possesses abundant *xratu-* energy as is indeed indicated by his epithet *aš.xradθastōma-* (Yt.10.141). In fact, the characteristic of this unsleeping (*ax^vafna-*) god is his possession of highly developed faculties of sight and hearing, as demonstrated by his epithets *hazaṭra.gaoša-* ‘of the thousand ears’ and *baēuuarə.cašman-* ‘of the ten thousand eyes’ (Yt.10.7) — the all-hearing following upon the all-seeing and together forming the divine omniscience, as Pettazzoni (1955: 196) perspicaciously pointed out.

Gershevitch rightly takes reference from the passage in Bailey (1971: 98 and n. 2) where a quotation from the *Dēnkard* sheds light on the visionary function of *āsn xrad* and its connection with subtle physiology of the soul: *wēnāgih <ī> mardōm az āsn-xradōmandih āsn xrad xwad ast wēnāgih nērōg ī gyān čašm az-iš winārišn* — ‘vision in men derives from the possession of the *āsna xratu*. This *āsna xratu* is itself the faculty of vision of the *jān*, whence the eye is ordered’. The doctrinaire compilation of the *Dēnkard* contains a wealth of references to a manifold conception of the vision, seeking to bring out its ‘colours’ (*rang*) and classify the different degrees

of eye aperture according to the greater or lesser intensity of the force (*zōr*) of Vohu Manah in the *axw* (de Menasce 1973: 354).

The reference made in *Yt*.19.107 to visual and auditory perception, at their most intense in Mithra but also common to humans within their earthly limitations, seems to me particularly important for reflection on the phenomenology of revelation in Zoroastrianism and the central role played by sight and hearing in communication between the human and celestial worlds. Some time ago in a celebrated study Jan Gonda (1963: 23) pointed out the mediating function of sight as a faculty granting ‘communion’ with the divine. We should also bear in mind his observations on the Indo-Iranian cultural heritage with regard to visionary experience: it should prove worthwhile to elaborate upon the points he made in the light of Kuiper’s observations (1964) on what is generally termed *Aryan Mysticism*.

This association of sight and hearing is also borne out in the recent *Yasna*, where *āsna- xratu-* is coupled with *gaošō.srūta- xratu-* in *Y*.25.6 (*āsnəm xratum mazdaδātəm yazamaide gaošō.srūtəm xratum mazdaδātəm yazamaide*). Here we find two specifications of *xratu-* energy — sight and hearing — which are combined in the figure of the god in the *Yašt* of Mithra but also appear in the recent *Yasna*, albeit with different terminologies, but alluding to the co-presence of essential faculties for ‘communion’ between the two worlds. Again, the combined faculties of sight and hearing may also be said to appear in the *Gāthās*, and precisely in *Y*.33.6, with reference to the knowledge man has of Ahura Mazda: this is verified through sight (*daršti-*) and communication (*hōm.paršti-* ‘con-versation’) with him. The same concept appears in *Y*.30.2, where the simultaneous *sraotā gōuš.aiš* ‘listen with (your) ears’ and *auuaēnatā sūcā* ‘look with (your) sight’ clearly indicates the same phenomenology of perception.

The two-fold nature of the experience of revelation, visual and auditory, was closely examined by Widengren (1979: 357) in a study focusing on the Avestan material and some important passages in later works such as the *Wahman Yašt*, from which he gathers that ‘l’expérience extatique du Prophète implique en même temps des visions et des auditions, des paroles qui expliquent ce qu’il a vu’. Thus sight must evidently be accompanied by the oral explanation which is summed up in a theological doctrine, expressed with the verb *sāh* and its derivatives.

Application of this bipolar sight/hearing schema to the corpus of Pahlavi texts would no doubt yield an array of evidence clearly showing the continuity of a heritage of notions transmitted throughout the history of Iranian culture. Without leaving the eschatological area we may cite chapter 11.2-3 of *AWN* where, on entering the dwelling of Ohrmazd, Wīrāz *sees* a great light, but it is Wahman who *says* what the light represents, specifying that it is the light of Ohrmazd. Yet more interesting is chapter 101.6, where the subject of the two-fold sight/hearing perception is Wīrāz himself, and without the mediation of other divine figures — like Wahman above — at that very, conclusive moment of his journey that coincides with his apotheosis, with the *vision* of Ohrmazd and the *hearing* of his words. This constituted his viaticum of wisdom in the principles of religion, and Wīrāz is to *communicate*

it to men on his return from his ultramundane peregrinations: *čē-m rōšnīh dīd u-m tan nē dīd u-m wāng ašnūd u-m dānist kū ēn ast Ohrmazd* — ‘je vis une lumière mais je ne vis personne et j’entendis une voix et je sus que c’était Ohrmazd’ (Gignoux 1984: 215).

It could be equally profitable to investigate the early periods of Zoroastrianism and trace back the precedents for these conceptions in Avestan literature. Recently Jan Kellens aptly recalled that in Early Avestan anthropology communication between gods and men is structured on the complementary relations between seeing and hearing — two verbs implying a verbal/non-verbal semiotic system that brings the exchange of words and signs into ritual. For men the ritual consists in recitation (*vacab-* and *uxda-*) and liturgical gestures (*šiiiaoθana-*), while the gods use daylight itself, which is their visible form, transmitting specific words to men such as *sāsnā-* and the formula (*maθra*) (Herrenschmidt & Kellens 1994: 51).

Given the task of reconstructing a wider-ranging thematic picture of *xratu-*, one cannot help wondering whether such references to the night’s vigil ‘to question the *xratu-*’ as found in *Vd.18.6*, *Vyt.41* and *Vd.4.45* may in fact be didactic, scholastic (as in the novitiate of the Hērbedestān) transpositions of a sapiential, soteriological teaching the roots of which go back to the notion of auroral *xratu-* rising from darkness to grant enlightenment: a *xratu-* qualified with the adjective *ašavan* in *Vd.18.6* and questioned by the *āθravan* the whole night long (*yō hauruuqm tarasca xšapanəm xratūm pərəsāt ašauuanəm*); a *xratu-* that ‘frees from distress’ (*qzō.būjim*), ‘grants freedom at the Cinvañt bridge’ (*rauuazdam cinnuat.pərotūm*), ‘bestows prosperity’ (*hauuaghō.dam*) — an epithet shared by Mithra in *Yt.10.65* — ‘vouchsafes life, grants Aša, grants the best of the best existence’ (*abu.nāsəm aša.nasəm vahišta.nasəm vahištabe aṇhəuš*).

We may sum up the arguments set out here in there basic points:

1) The new etymology of *āsna-* has demonstrated that attestations of this headword, especially in *Yt.10.107* and *Yt.17.2* match the textual occurrences of *san* (*Yt.10.13* and *Vd.19.28-30*), reciprocally bringing out the sense of each other in a symmetrical pattern of meanings attributable to the broad area of light symbolism, of fundamental importance for understanding of certain aspects of Zoroastrian anthropology and the mystical-ecstatic doctrines based on vision.

2) Analysis of the whole body of evidence places *san* and *āsna-* in a historical-religious context dominated by the mythological figures in the Mithraic équipe: Mithra (*Yt.10.13* and *107*, *Vd.19.28*), Aši (*Yt.17.2*) and Daēnā (*Vd.19.30*).

3) The figure of Saošyānt is also comprehensible within a Mithraic scenario, examination of the style and formulas of the Gathic texts (*Y.46.3*) and the *Zamyād Yašt* pointing to an auroral ambit. We may in fact state that the role of Saošyānt brings out the relations between Early Avestan and later texts, the former being marked by more liturgical-sacrificial connotations, the latter more pronouncedly eschatological.

ADDENDA

Before concluding these considerations on *āsna- xratu-* there is a final point to take into account regarding the headword ²*āsna-*, which Bartholomae (1904: 341) translated as ‘erfolgreich wirksam, tüchtig’, listing two categories of textual occurrences: in one refers to *manah-*, in the other to *frazantī-*. In the case of the *frazantī-* category, I do not think any particular corrections need to be made, and we may leave the sense of ‘efficacy’ associated with progeny. On the other hand, in the case of the only two attestations of ²*āsna- manah-* I believe we must see a synonymous relation between *manah-* and *xratu-*, conceivable in terms of the noetic-intellective compass implied by these two terms. If we then go on to consider the terminology as a whole in *Yt.13.74* and *Vr.11.3*, we find a series of notions in the line of *āsna-/manah-/daēnā-/saošyānt-* showing the same pattern of concepts presented above once we have substituted *manah-* with *xratu-*. The phrase *āsnā yazamaide manā yazamaide daēnā yazamaide saošiiaṇtām yazamaide* in *Yt.13.74* presents a particular construction in which *āsna-* appears to be independent of *manah-* on account of the repetition of *yazamaide*. Bartholomae (1904: 120) and Hertel (1929: 162) group it under the translation of ¹*asna-*, i.e. ‘innate’, ‘angeboren, natürlich’. Thus, despite Bartholomae’s classification, two-fold solutions for the translation of *āsna-* recur in the history of studies, with the alternative rubrics of ‘innate’ and ‘efficacious’. There can be no question of including *frazantī-* in ¹*asna-*; for the purposes of my analysis the adjective is interpreted as ‘rising’ solely in relation with the substantive *xratu-*. However, given the interchangeableness of *manah-* and *xratu-* I believe we can also include this litany in *Yt.13.74* (like that in *Vr.11.3*) with the different interpretation I advance for ¹*asna-*, i.e. ‘rising’, proposing this translation: ‘we sacrifice to the rising thoughts, we sacrifice to the daēnās of the Saošyānts’.

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